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ABSTRACT

Leadership in higher education is considered from the perspective of its symbolic dimensions. Results of a study of presidential perceptions of leadership are also examined in order to uncover the symbolic forms that leaders use to accomplish their goals. Organizational symbolism and interpretations of leadership are considered. Topics include: how organizational participants create meaning within a dynamic system; the way that symbolism enhances and helps define leadership; and constraints that the organization imposes on a leader's use of symbols. Data from a national sample of 32 presidents were obtained from the Institutional Leadership Project of the National Center for Postsecondary Governance and Finance. The sample included 16 presidents who had served 3 years or less and 16 presidents who had served 5 years or more. Interviews with the college presidents resulted in six categories that symbols may take: metaphorical, physical, communicative, structural, personification, and ideational. Three ideas concerning the symbolic aspects of leadership are addressed: symbols demand corroboration; symbols should be used consistently with the organization's culture; and presidents should use all symbolic forms. Included are 19 references. (SW)

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SYMBOLISM AND PRESIDENTIAL PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP[1]

Presented at:

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Abstract

This paper seeks to shed light on the discussion of leadership in higher education from the perspective of its symbolic dimensions. Based on a sample of 32 institutions drawn from data of the National Center for Postsecondary Governance and Finance's Institutional Leadership Project. the paper first consider leadership from the perspective of postsecondary organizations as socially-constructed and subjective entities. The paper then examines six symbolic forms used by presidents as ways they perceive of leadership. The forms are: metaphorical. physical. communicative. structural. personification. and ideational. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications for administrators of understanding the symbolism of their leadership.

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Introduction

In the last decade organizational researchers have shown considerable interest in the interpretive aspects of organizational life. Rather than viewing an organization as rational and objective, theorists have turned their attention to the analysis of organizations as socially-constructed and subjective entities. Symbolism has emerged as a critical theme. For example, Birnbaum has investigated the symbolic aspects of the academic senate (1987); Pfeffer has considered management as symbolic action (1981); and Tierney has undertaken a semiotic analysis of a private, liberal arts college (1987a).

Researchers also have noted the significance of a leader's use of symbols. "The only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture," notes Edgar Schein, " ... the unique talent of leaders is their ability to work with culture" (1985, p. 2). Birnbaum has commented, "To emphasize the importance of leadership as myth and symbol is not to denigrate the role of leaders, but rather to identify a particularly critical function that they play" (forthcoming, p. 436). If a central component of leadership is to manage the symbolic aspects of the organization, then necessarily it is helpful to investigate what leaders perceive leadership to be, and what symbolic activities leaders perceive they have utilized to fulfill their own perceptions of leadership.

This paper seeks to shed light on the discussion of leadership in higher education from the perspective of its symbolic dimensions. By investigating presidential perceptions of leadership we uncover the symbolic forms leaders use to accomplish their goals. Based on data from the National Center for Postsecondary Governance and Finance's Institutional Leadership Project, this paper has four parts. First, I discuss

organizational symbolism. Second. I consider leadership from an interpretive perspective. Third. I discuss the methodology and I incorporate the data used from the Institutional Leadership Project to examine the symbolic aspects of presidential perceptions of leadership. I conclude with a discussion of the implications for administrators of understanding the symbolism of their leadership.

I. The Interpretation of Symbols

Organizational theorists (Dandridge. et al.. 1980: Trice & Beyer. 1984: Pettigrew. 1979: Peters & Waterman. 1982) have tended to view symbols either as objects or as reified objects that serve as vehicles for conveying meaning. The assumption in this paper. however. is that symbols connote more than objectivized meaning. and they are not simply vehicles in which meaning resides--a tabernacle which holds institutional beliefs. Symbols are strategies for understanding. and hence. acting in the organizational world. Symbols help organizational participants make sense of the organization.

Symbols exist within an organization whether or not the organization's participants are aware of these symbols. To speak of an organization is to speak of interpretation and symbols. An organization void of symbolism is an organization bereft of human activity. Given that symbols exist wherever human activity occurs. a central question for researchers is how to define and to uncover symbols in organizations. Particularly germane for this paper is how to interpret symbols of leadership.

Symbols reside in a wide variety of discursive and non-discursive message units: an act. event. language. dress. structural roles. ceremonies. or even spatial positions in an organization. Hence. the need exists to understand the context in which symbols function. and the way

leaders use symbols to create and interpret their organizational reality. For example, what may be considered a highly charged symbol in one organization may be void of symbolic content in another institution, or in the same organization at a later point in time.

When we speak of symbols we acknowledge--implicitly and explicitly--the determinacy of contexts that surround them. Symbols are matters of interpretation between an organizational actor and the audience. When we speak of symbols, our intent should not be to reify symbolic messages as if symbols were objects that signify a single message. Indeed, that which makes a symbol a symbol is neither the object nor the intention of the speaker about the object. Rather, it is the context and process of signification itself--the shared interpretive activity based on a common set of codes--that endow symbols with their power.

Clearly, widely told organizational myths or elaborate rituals are symbolic. However, symbolism also pervades ordinary and minute activities of organizational life. Stephen Barley has observed:

> Once we recognize the pervasiveness of signification, we are no longer constrained to look for cultural phenomena in the overtly symbolic and can focus on how members of an organization or occupation interpret a wide range of phenomena--including chairs, air, and sunlight--entities so mundane as to appear irrelevant to the well-intentioned but culturally ignorant researcher (1983, p. 409).

As with any act of communication, the audience that receives a message must necessarily interpret what the message means. A manager who walks around a building, casually talking with subordinates, for example, may provide a symbol that management cares about everyone who works in the organization. Conversely, organizational participants may feel that the leader is "checking up" on everyone and that such symbolic behavior is intrusive.

Similarly, leaders who remain sequestered in their offices and never converse informally with subordinates may convey in their business-oriented approach the message that formalized tasks, rules, and procedures are what is important to the organization. The point is not that a leader must utilize this or that tactic to be an effective leader. Rather, I wish to suggest that "management by walking around" as well as any other management strategy, is a symbolic act open to interpretation. A manager's informal style can symbolize any number of messages to different constituencies--friendship, intrusiveness, or harassment, to name but a few possible interpretations. What, then, defines a symbol?

To uncover the meaning, value and understanding of a symbol one neither looks at an object--reified or otherwise--as endowed with consensual symbolic content, nor defines a symbol as that which drives institutional meaning. Rather, one investigates not only the symbol's power but also its context. This analysis views an organization as an ongoing tale with a particular history that is dynamic, not frozen, in an interactional present tense. Symbols emerge as an organizational strategy, design, or emblem that seek to encompass or interpret situations for organizational participants.

Thus, this paper orients the discussion of symbolism toward a contextual understanding of how organizational participants create meaning within a dynamic system. Accordingly, I reject the idea that symbols have single, shared meanings. To be sure, socialization practices and the historical development of an organization bring about conscious and unconscious acceptance of symbols. Nevertheless, the recognition of a symbol's meaning is more complex than previous definitions would have us believe.

Symbols exist within a dialectical framework out of which organizational ideologies arise. Within an organization's framework, a set of basic beliefs or set of practices exist which help to constitute and shape individual consciousness, to orient participants in the organizational world, and to guide belief and action. Ideology, "the general framework that shapes individual consciousness, guides and legitimates belief and action, and renders experience meaningful." (Siegel, 1987, p. 133) shapes and is shaped by organizational symbols.

As conscious or unconscious strategies for participant understanding of the organization, symbols change and evolve due to historical ruptures, the larger system in which the organization resides, and individual influence. Individuals attach significance to any number of phenomena, and it is in the context of the organization itself that symbols acquire shared meaning. In this light, the key to understanding organizational symbols lies in delineating the symbolic forms whereby the participants communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life (Geertz, 1973).

One manner in which participants interpret symbols is from other organizational participants. Within an organization a primary transmitter of symbols is the organizational leader. How leaders perceive of leadership and the forms they use to convey different messages provide a wealth of information not only about a leader, but also about the organization. We now turn to a discussion of how symbolism and leadership interact.

II. Leadership and Symbolism

When investigating the symbolic aspects of leadership we will initially consider two points. First, how does symbolism enhance and help define leadership? Second, what constraints does the organization impose on a leader's use of symbols?

With regard to how symbolism enhances and helps define leadership, it is worth quoting Clifford Geertz at length. He observes that leaders:

> Justify their existence and order their actions in terms of a collection of stories, ceremonies, insignia, formalities, and appurtenances that they have either inherited, ... or invented. It is these--crowns and coronations, limousines and conferences--that mark the center as center and give what goes on there its aura of being not merely important but in some odd fashion connected with the way the world is built (1983, p. 124).

Symbolism is intertwined with participants expectations and understanding of leadership. The symbolic role of a college or university president allows an individual to try to communicate a vision of the institution that other individuals are most likely incapable of communicating. We comprehend leadership by symbols such as the president's yearly speech at convocation or, as will be shown, by a host of activities that "mark the center as center."

Yet leaders are not entirely free to define what is or is not symbolic. Organizations channel activity and interpretation so that constraints exist with regard to a leader's use of symbols. Merely because a college president intends for an open door to signify open communication does not mean that the faculty will interpret such a sign in the way the president has intended the sign to be read. Insofar as most leaders in higher education have inherited organizations with a history, the parameters of the organization's culture and ideology will help determine what is symbolic and what is not symbolic for a college president.

Organizational participants need to feel that they comprehend what is going on in the organization. To do so, they interpret abstractions, following suggestions often made by their leaders. Bailey notes, "We focus on some things and ignore others: we impose a pattern on the flow of events, and thus 'falsify' them if only by simplifying the diversity and the complexity ... and so make the real world comprehensible" (1983, p. 18).

College presidents highlight some activities and ignore others: they employ a wide variety of symbolic forms to communicate their messages to different constituencies. To adequately understand how leaders make sense of the organizational universe for their followers it is important to deconstruct the underlying conceptual and ideological orientations that presidents bring to their leadership roles and contexts. It is these concepts and ideologies that shape presidents' perceptions of their organizations and presidential actions within those organizations. Thus symbolism both defines leadership and is defined by the organization in which the leader resides.

III. Methodology and Data

During the academic year 1986-87 the research team collected interview data from a national sample of thirty-two presidents (eight each from major research universities, public four-year colleges, independent colleges, and community colleges). The sample included sixteen "new" presidents (defined as three years or less) and sixteen "old" presidents (defined as five years or more). The data source derives from a five-year longitudinal study of college and university leadership currently being conducted by the National Center for Postsecondary Governance and Finance. Utilizing a common

protocol. the research team conducted three-hour interviews with each of the presidents.

Data for this paper derives from three analytical questions drawn from each president's responses:

1. What is the meaning of "good" presidential leadership?
2. What have you done as a presidential leader?
3. What are you like as a presidential leader?

In reviewing the transcripts of presidential responses I have mined the data for any comments that were symbolic in nature. Building on previous discussions of what defines a symbol (Deal & Kennedy. 1982: Eco. 1979: Trice & Beyer. 1984). I then disagregated the data into six categories: metaphorical. physical. communicative. structural. personification. and ideational. As will be shown. the categories are not always mutually exclusive: a symbol may fall within more than one form. or reinforce another symbolic form. By no means do I intend to imply that all organizational symbols fall exclusively within these six categories. This is an "essay" in the root sense of the word--a trial of some ideas. Indeed. one intent of this paper is to attempt to provide a provisional structure about how we think about and categorize symbolism in organizations.

In reviewing the data I neither found significant differences in the way the presidents symbolically perceived of leadership due to institutional type nor did I find substantial differences between new presidents' and old presidents' symbolic perceptions of leadership. Instead. I found similarities across type and between new and old presidents. as well as differences within type and among the same presidential generation. As we will see. however. what is particularly

Table 1

Frequency Count and Percentage Use by Institutional Type

Type	Total Count	M	P	C	S	Pe	I
Community College	50	6	10	17	11	4	2
		12%	20%	34%	22%	8%	4%
State College	94	13	7	40	18	10	6
		14%	7%	43%	19%	11%	6%
Private College	73	9	13	28	13	8	4
		12%	17%	37%	17%	11%	5%
University	40	1	2	15	14	6	2
		3%	5%	38%	35%	15%	5%
Percent of Total	259	29	32	100	56	28	14
		11%	12%	39%	22%	11%	5%

Table 2

Percentage of Use by Old and New

Type	M	P	C	S	Pe	I
Old	13%	14%	40%	21%	8%	5%
New	9%	11%	37%	22%	14%	6%

M = Metaphorical
P = Physical
C = Communicative
S = Structural
Pe = Personification
I = Ideational

important when we analyze symbols in an organization is the manner and intention with which presidents utilize symbols. That is, two presidents may utilize the same symbolic form with the same frequency, but their purpose will be quite different. What follows is a discussion of each form and how the presidents perceived the form as a symbolic strategy.

Metaphorical

Metaphors are figures of speech. Presidents provide figures of speech for themselves, their organization, environment, and activities as if something were that particular other. The metaphors an individual use provide participants with a portrait of how the organization functions. One president noted:

> My philosophy of leadership is to have a team approach to managing the college. The Executive Committee is a group that shares certain values and expectations, and we push each other hard for the good of the college. What is essential is that we have an effective team, and that we portray that to the Board and the community.

Another individual consistently mentioned how it was important "to provide the glue" so that the organization "sticks together." And still another president spoke of organizational participants as "troops" that needed to be rallied.

Presidents also use different metaphors to describe themselves. "I am militaristic, ... like a football coach," observed one. "I am their counselor," added another. And a third individual was a maestro: "Being president is like an orchestra conductor."

Metaphors lend participants a way of seeing, and hence, acting in the organizational universe. The organization where the participants see themselves as a team presumably interacts differently than the organization

that is led by a general who commands troops. Similarly, an organization that needs glue is different from an organization where it is unimportant to stick together, and the metaphor concerns "everyone pulling their own weight."

Bailey's comment about "interpreting abstractions" is highlighted by presidential use of metaphors. Presidents perceive themselves as leaders in a multitude of ways. By focusing on particular metaphors a president simplifies the organizational universe by providing an image of the leadership and the organization. However, the success or failure of a metaphor as a strategy relates to how the metaphor fits with the organization's ideology. That is, a faculty that sees itself as an academy of scholars may rebel at the idea that they are troops being led by a general.

Physical

Physical symbols refer to objects that are meant to mean something other than what they really are. Perhaps the most common device for a leader to use as a symbol is a physical object. Artifacts are tangible examples participants have that leaders want to signify a particular message. However, as with all symbolic forms, physical symbols may not signify what the leader intends the symbol to signify. For example, one president noted that the acquisition of personal computers for each faculty member made:

> a statement about the distinctiveness of the learning experience here. The purpose of this action was not to give PC's to the faculty but to set forth a philosophy, to make a statement that we are changing teaching here.

As the president notes, the intention was to make a statement with a physical symbol, "that we are changing teaching here." Clearly, on some

campuses alternative interpretations might exist. A humanities faculty might interpret the acquisition of software as the natural sciences encroachment on their turf. A science faculty who already owned personal computers but worked in a building that needs to be renovated might interpret computers as a sign that the president is pandering to the liberal arts. The point is not that one interpretation is right and the other wrong. but rather that physical objects need to be seen within the context of the organization and its constituencies.

New libraries. attention to the grounds. a faculty club. school ties and scarves. and a host of other physical artifacts are designed as symbolic representations to various constituencies by presidents. Another individual noted how the college remained open when students took over a building. The president noted how the campus "carried on." By the president's symbolic use of space the president intended for the community to understand that the college was more than buildings and that even under a period of duress the institution would continue.

Communicative

Communication entails not only symbolic events committed by oral discourse. but also written communicative acts and non-verbal activities that serve to signify particular meanings by a president to a constituency. "I try to rub elbows with students and faculty on a regular basis." related one president. "I used to spend evenings in the Student Center. I try to make faculty council meetings. and I talk to faculty on campus." Another individual related. "I call each of the faculty by their first name. During the year. all of them will be entertained in my home." "I send

birthday cards to all full-time faculty." related a third leader. And a fourth president commented:

> During a normal workday I will walk over to some other person's office maybe seven or eight times. It is really time consuming to be doing that. and I could save time by just picking up the phone. But I get mileage out of doing that. however. that is immeasurable. ... I am visible.

Given the popularity of texts such as In Search of Excellence and Corporate Cultures it is commonplace to hear leaders discuss their management style as "management by walking around." And. indeed. many leaders do "walk around." As American organizations struggle to emulate what they perceive to be Japanese models of effectiveness and efficiency. communicative symbols serve as functional vehicles for organizational success.

Talking with students "on their turf." entertaining faculty. walking either around the campus or into offices all exist as presidential perceptions of communication. Most often. the symbol is meant to convey presidential concern: presidents think of themselves as caring individuals when they talk with students about student concerns. To use yet another symbolic metaphor. presidents perceive they understand their constituencies by "taking the heartbeat of the campus" when they symbolically communicate by knowing everyone's first name. or sending someone a birthday card.

Structural

Symbolic structures refer to institutional structures and processes that signify more than who reports to whom. Of the six symbolic forms mentioned in this paper it is the structural form that most differentiates new presidents from old presidents. Birnbaum has noted. "New administrators ... are more likely to attempt to make significant changes in institutional structure and operation. ... Administrators (are) ... more likely

to talk about the 'mess' that they inherited and the aggressive steps they had to take to clear it up" (forthcoming. p. 125). Although. as mentioned. I have not uncovered any aggregated differences between new and old presidents' symbolic perceptions--including the structural form--within the structural form I have found Birnbaum's comment to be correct. That is. the intent of new presidents differs from that of old presidents when they use the structural form.

New presidents tend to embrace decision making structures as symbolic emblems of change more so than individuals who are no longer new to their jobs. Although older presidents utilize structures as symbols. structures do not necessarily connote change: instead structures may imply any number of significations. Commented one new president:

> I did not create the faculty council. It was here when I arrived. But under my predecessor. people on that council were selected by the president and it was an at-large position. I have changed that so that there is one faculty representative per division and they are elected by the faculty.

Another new president said. "I set up a task force when I first came in here." The task force was primarily senior faculty who helped the president create fundamental changes in the college. An older president said. "When I came in. I developed the traditional vice presidential offices. The first thing I did was to create a traditional administrative structure--an administrative team."

One new college president spoke indirectly about the symbolic implications of structural changes:

> I created two vice president positions--one for academic affairs and the other for public relations: I upgraded the dean of research to vice president. More reorganization took place at the deans level too. I had to change the football coach and the athletic director. This situation enabled me to establish the

fact that the president would be running the college, not the athletic director.

None of the examples provided here, indeed, no examples of symbols in general, serve a purely singular purpose. When a president takes office, it is certainly conceivable that an administrative structure may be unsuitable to the president's style or needs. Changing such a structure may account for particular outcomes or goals. At the same time by changing a structure the president also signals to the college community that life as it previously existed will change. From this perspective, the president's action accounts not only for structural change, but also for the perception of change.

Borrowing from Merton (1957), Birnbaum has termed symbols such as those noted here as functionally "latent." Although structural change may produce needed outcomes, Birnbaum contends that latent functions exist that, "are meeting less obvious, but still important, organizational needs" (1987, p. 5). The findings from the data tend to suggest that new presidents utilize structural change in large part because of its latent function: they draw heavily on structural symbols to place their imprimatur on the institution.

Task forces may provide someone with good ideas, and a different electoral system may be an improvement upon a previous system, but in essence, the president uses these devices to symbolize change. An older president commented, "During my time we have elaborated the administrative style of the institution. (My predecessor) was more of a one-person operator." Again, the administrative structure comes into play as a presidential perception of structural change--or evolution.

Personification

Symbolic personification refers to a leader's intent to represent a message with an individual or group. For example. on a national level. we often find political appointees who symbolize an elected leader's commitment to a particular constituency. President Reagan's choice of a woman to the Supreme Court was intended to symbolize his concern for women. College presidents also perceive that particular groups or individuals symbolize particular messages to different communities. One president noted. "When we changed the governance structure we put the president of the student government on and he or she is involved in everything we discuss. The individual is a full member of the administrative structure." Thus. the president perceived not only that the administrative structure symbolized a message. but also who sat on the governing body symbolized. in this case. concern for student ideas.

Another president commented about the rising quality of the student body and noted. "We have finally started getting the recognition we deserve to have." The example the individual mentioned as recognition for rising quality was that "the big eight" accounting firms had been recruiting on campus. Major marketing companies symbolized that the institution's quality had risen.

One college president felt the need to emphasize "excellent teaching." A potent symbol was the appointment of "three deans and a VP who have all had teaching experience and have had department chair experience. And I told the deans that they were required to teach." Thus. this president's perception of leadership was to utilize personal symbols as a means of reorienting the culture of the organization.

Presidents also see themselves as symbols of the institution. One president spoke for many commenting. "I had to get out in the community because no one had been out there before. I wanted people to think of the college as entering a new era." The presidents' willingness to meet the public was perhaps the most tangible example of symbolic personification. Presidents are the college: or at least they perceive themselves to be.

Ideational

Ideas as symbols refer to images leaders convey about the mission and purpose of the institution. Presidents generate ideas that serve as symbolic ideologies about their institutions. Clark's (1980) notion of an institutional saga is a cogent example of an ideational symbol where leaders attempt to seize a unique role for their institution. A president perceives that leadership itself is inextricably bound up with the symbolic generation of an institutional mission or ideology.

Ideational symbols are often the most difficult category for constituents to interpret if the symbol is divorced from a tangible context. That is. particular ideas that presidents perceive as important may appear to be no more than presidential rhetoric to a constituency that is unable to have the symbol palpably interpreted to them.

"I wanted a new image. a comprehensive quality." commented one leader. Another individual downgraded the importance of athletics at the institution. The president said:

> The first statement I would make as President would be about athletics. and I knew that it would be heard throughout all the towns and cities. I wanted it to be a statement not about athletics. but about what the institution would be and do in the future. I want us to be known for great education and not great athletics. I wanted it to be a statement about the kind of students we want.

The images that presidents struggle to convey to their constituencies are symbolic representations of institutional values. What a president perceives to be the value of the institution is oftentimes what the institution will try to achieve. By definition. an institution with a unique identity cannot be all things to all people. The symbolic idea serves as the unifying principle for the organization. Many colleges and universities are committed to distinctive ideas. College presidents who emphasizes one idea over another impart their to constituents what they believe to be the primary goal of the institution.

III. Discussion

I offer here three suggestions for organizational leaders to consider with regard to the symbolic aspects of leadership. As will become apparent. rather than provide the reader with a formulaic prescription of how to function in the organizational universe. I tender three proposals for understanding one's own perceptions and the culture in which one operates. The suggestions are components of a diagnostic frame of reference. a way of interpreting one's organization. I propose ways for leaders to identify what they must do to comprehend the symbolic dimensions of their leadership.

1. Symbols demand corroboration

As noted. the research team queried the presidents about how they defined good leadership and what they had done as leaders. The interviews revealed several contradictions between what each intended as a symbol and how the president said they acted. That is. on occasion. discrepancies existed between what a leader perceived good leadership to be. and how they actually acted.

One president believes in visibility, for example, yet only meets formally with the faculty once a year. Another president's ideational symbol was "excellence" and to be known as a top rate institution, yet later on in the interview the individual spoke about institutional survival as the top priority. A third president cited the Faculty Council as a structural symbol and the personal symbol of the faculty as critically important, yet no formal vehicles existed whereby the president actually met with the faculty. And still another president tried to communicate symbolically that open, frank discussion was critically important, yet at the same time demanded "extraordinary loyalty" to the president.

The point is not that individuals seek to deceive their constituencies. Instead, leaders should be aware of how symbolic forms may contradict one another. Simply because one walks around a campus, or stresses "teamwork" does not necessarily imply that collegiality exists. Leaders need to contextualize their perceptions and search for contradictions. We all have discrepancies between what we say and what we do. For an organizational leader a greater consistency and corroboration of words and deeds allows followers a clearer understanding of a leader's intention.

2. Utilize symbols consistent with the organization's culture

The culture of an organization is a social construction dependent not only on the perceptions of a leader, but also the unique history of the organization, the individual orientations and perceptions of the followers, and the larger environmental influences. The cultural paradigm assumes that an organization does not consist of rational, "real" entities (Tierney, 1987b).

Everyday existence is a constant matter of interpretation among organizational participants. Rather than assume a functional view of symbols and a passive view of individuals we need to reconceptualize culture as an interpretive dynamic whereby a leader's symbols may or may not be interpreted the way the individual has intended the symbols to be interpreted. Thus, dissonance will occur even if a president corroborates symbols, but utilizes symbols that are inconsistent with the organization's culture.

A new president, for example, may want to symbolize care and concern for the faculty and structurally reorganize the decision making process to make it more participative through the use of more councils and committees. The president's perception and symbolic intent is to highlight a structural symbol. The strategy may fail, however, if at the same time the president ignores that the culture has relied for a generation on presidential informality and one-on-one conversations with faculty.

As noted in the first part of this paper, symbols are derived from the organization's culture. Merely because someone intends something to symbolize a particular idea does not mean that organizational participants will interpret the symbol in the intended manner. Thus, leaders need to understand the internal dynamic at work in their organization and utilize symbols that are consistent with their organization's culture. The challenge for the president is not only to search for contradictions in symbolic forms, but also to understand how those symbolic forms exist within the organization's culture. If symbols are neither reified nor functional than we must necessarily investigate their contextual surroundings to understand them.

3. Utilize all symbolic forms

Leaders, not unlike most individuals, are intuitively aware that particular objects or activities are highly imbued with symbolism. In this paper we have seen how presidents rely on new buildings or new computers to convey a message. Similarly, the well-read manager today believes that particular management tips about communication hold symbolic value.

Yet as we have seen, a wide array of symbolic categories exist that a leader may employ within each category a multitude of symbols can also be generated. Further, a multitude of activities, acts, and the like also exist within a symbolic form. Rather than rely on the symbolic content of a single convocation speech every year, a president might benefit from employing a wide array of consistent symbolic forms. We tend to compartmentalize activities in order to simplify them: yet that is not how organizational participants experience reality.

All acts within an organization are open to interpretation: virtually everything a leader does or says (or does not do or say) is capable of symbolic interpretation. To acknowledge the pervasiveness of symbols in an organization does not imply that a leader is in charge of an anarchic organization that interprets messages the way it wants. Instead, a central challenge for the leader is to interpret the culture of the organization and to draw upon all of the symbolic forms effectively so that participants can make sense of organizational activities.

Conclusion

My intent has been to outline the symbolic dimensions of how presidents perceive of leadership. A symbolic view of leadership and organizations needs to move beyond functionalist definitions of organizational

symbolism. We need to come to terms with the processes whereby organizational members interpret the symbolic activities of leaders. rather than assume that all individuals march to the same organizational beat. We need to investigate why a particular symbol may be potent in one organization and relatively useless in another organization.

The assumption at work in this paper has been that although both the structure and expressions of colleges and universities change. the inner necessities that drive it do not. "Thrones may be out of fashion." states Geertz. "and pageantry too: but authority still requires a cultural frame in which to define itself and advance its claims" (1983. p.143). If symbolism helps define authority in higher education than we should continue to struggle to come to terms with the symbolic manifestations of organizational life and leadership.

Notes

1. The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance and suggestions of James F. Trainer and R. Dean Foster in the preparation of this paper.

2. In order to ensure anonymity I have cleansed the data in a variety of ways. I have avoided gender-specific pronouns. I refer to all leaders as "college president," whether or not they are a college or university president. All references to a specific grouping on a college campus have been sanitized. For example, in the text whenever I have referred to a senior administrative group I have used the term "Executive Committee"; whenever I have discussed a faculty group I have referred to "faculty council." Similarly, student groups have been referred to as "student government" and so on. Thus, all terms utilized in the article have been changed from the original transcripts to protect the confidentiality of the speakers and their campuses.

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